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THE WRITINGS OF W. M. THACKERAY.

There is no form of literary composition in which the character and spirit of an age and country are so distinctly reflected as in the prose fiction. To hold the mirror up to nature, has always been the vocation of the novelist, not less than of the dramatist, and in these later days it has become his special function. The progress of fiction as an art has therefore kept pace with the changes in the habits of thought, the morals, the customs, and the manners of a people. It has never ceased to be the most popular form of literature; for the instinct to which it appeals is all but universal, manifesting itself in the fable and the rude tale which belong to the infancy of literature, and in the story-books which belong to the childhood of us all. Taking its character from the age, the art of fiction, as distinguished from the impulse and art of poetry, has progressed from the purely romantic and the ideal, first, to a combination of the romantic with the realistic aspects of human life, and latterly, to the point of reflecting the actual and every-day life of mankind. The age in which we live has lost the credulity which made the pure romance popular in bygone times, and demands from the novelist an adherence to at least the possible, if not to the actual—an attention to the laws which experience teaches us to recognise as regulating society, and to the elements which go to the formation of human character, as we know it. This tendency has, of course, in a great measure revolutionised the art of novel writing. Doubtless the loves and sorrows, the hopes and fears, of mankind are the same to the modern novelist in the abstract as they were to his predecessor; but in dealing with the external circumstances by which, or in which, these are manifested, he must pursue a different course. It is demanded of him that he adhere to the usages of society, and to its recognised proprieties, that he respect its prevailing moral tone, and in satirising its follies, that he evinces a higher purpose than that of mere amusement. If it is essential to our enjoyment of a work of fiction that the critical as well as the creative element be largely exhibited, we look for the principles on behalf of which that element is evoked. In short, our extended knowledge of the world, as we choose to term it, has made us somewhat sceptical alike to character and conduct; and our complex age requires from the novelist not only a rigid adherence to outward circumstances, to probabilities, and to the chronological sequence of events, but a display of moral anatomy. Now it seems to us that such demands infer the assignment of a higher province to the novelist than simply that of amusement; and in spite of prefatory declarations that no higher aim has been taken than that which the broadly comic writer proposes to himself, it is obvious that our modern humorists have accepted of the province assigned to them, and have a higher aim than merely to entertain. If proof of this were needed, we should only have to point to the objects for which so many novels are now written—objects which stand in a very close relation to important social interests. Satire and humour are the sword and buckler with which shams and hypocrisy are being assailed. Truths even of the most momentous kind are thrust into the general mind under cover, so to speak, of something which all of us can enjoy. The novel which blends sentiment with satire, then, which reveals to us the workings of the mainsprings of that society in which we mingle, and which makes us acquainted with characters such as are familiar to us, these at the same time representing truths which concern us all, is at once the most popular and the most valuable.

A master of this, the realistic style of novel writing, made his first appearance in the world of letters as a writer of sketches, which might have been considered mere caricatures, but for the serious purpose which was occasionally manifested in them. Some years have elapsed since the readers of light literature became cognisant of the existence of Mr Michael Angelo Titmarsh, a gentleman who, at the outset of his career, was deemed chiefly noticeable for his tendency to indulge in what the Cockneys call 'chaffing.' He was by no means a favourite with the admirers of the romantic and sentimental. His writings rather inferred a contempt for those things, and betrayed a habit of looking below the surface of

society. It was noticeable, too, that Mr Titmarsh's satirical powers were of a very keen and pungent order, and that they were always manifested most fully when applied to the follies of fashionable life. As the editor of the papers of Mr Charles Edward Harrington Fitzroy Yellowplush, 'sometime footman in many genteel families,' he chose to take up rather an Ishmaelitish position, not contenting himself with tacitly homologating the sentiments of Mr Yellowplush in reference to the 'goings-on' in high society, but even allowing that gentleman, in the worst possible orthography, to serve up several of the popular authors of the day. In short, Mr Titmarsh gave the world to understand that he was not to be dazzled by the mere outward shows of social life, and did not intend to spare even his own order, when he found in it things which were not consistent with the pretensions made—found fopperies, absurdities, and hypocrisies, which, in his estimation, were rather derogatory than otherwise to the character of men who professed to be men, and to the dignity of literary men in particular. Mr Titmarsh was deemed not only a quick observer, a ready detector, and merciless exposer of all the 'shams' which lay within his range, but a humorist, whom it was impossible to dislike, even although you felt that his next book might possibly contain a full-length portrait of yourself, painted with rather a severe truthfulness, or, at least, not exactly in the style in which you would wish such a work to be painted, if designed for a public exhibition-room. There was one thing which rendered Mr Titmarsh's humour not only bearable, but sometimes very refreshing:—he never pretended to be either wiser or better than those whom he invited you and others to laugh at. If he put the cap and bells upon your head, he gave you distinctly to understand that it would fit him equally well, and that he occasionally put it on and wore it for his own private amusement. It cannot be denied, however, that this display of self-consciousness on the part of Mr Titmarsh also gave great force to his satire. It is recorded that more than one wise man made a pretence of folly in order to get at and make use of information regarding the ways of others, and it was no part of our author's design to make a fool of himself gratuitously. In the prosecution of that design, which was simply the exposure of knavery, insincerity, and folly, it was even then admitted that considerable freshness of feeling and vigour of thought were manifested. Still, it was simply as a satirist that Mr Thackeray, under his *nom de plume*, or *nom de guerre*, of Titmarsh, invited our attention. He did not then aspire to the position which he has since attained. His 'Comic Tales and Sketches,' published in 1841, had scarcely any higher merit than that of broad satirical humour. Although the characters of Mr Yellowplush, Mr Deuceace, and Major Gahagan, in that very amusing book, are undoubtedly entitled to be regarded as felicitous sketches from real life, each of them, particularly the first and last, is exaggerated to the degree of caricature, and depend for their interest chiefly upon their ludicrous individuality, or their satirical narratives. In the 'Amours of Mr Deuceace,' it is true, there is an approach to the incidents and characters with which Mr Thackeray has made us familiar in his more finished works, while the moral conveyed differs but little from that which he has since enforced more pleasantly; but we must regard the book as only satirical. There is none of that refinement of feeling, and none of those higher views of life, which we are entitled to expect from the novelist as an artist. The effect of its humour is heightened by an occasional contrast of deep and stern pathos, and by the terrible truth of the pictures which are drawn. The characters of the dissolute gambler, the Hon. Percy Algernon Deuceace himself, of the Earl of Crabs, his cold-blooded and equally disreputable father, of Lady Griffin, and her stepdaughter Matilda, who becomes the victim of a mercenary marriage, are sketches, however, rather than finished portraits; and although such incidents as those in which the villany of the gamester and the misery of his dupes are illustrated, cannot be regarded as improbable, they belong to those probabilities which we wish the novelist either to avoid altogether, or temper with some gleam of a better nature. There is nothing in the history of Mr Deuceace which we care to dwell upon. It is one so altogether dark, so destitute of a redeeming trait of character or cheering incident, that we gladly shut the brutality of the husband, the mercilessness of the parents, and the misery of the deluded wife, out of our recollection. It is otherwise with Mr Yellowplush and the tremendous Major Gahagan. The easy impertinence of the first of these gentlemen

is quite captivating. With him, and his younger brother *Jeames*, we get upon quite a familiar footing, and find them to be not only very amusing companions, but occasionally rather of a reflective turn of mind. A vein of delicate sarcasm runs through the whole of Mr Yellowplush's autobiography, and the ease, nay, we might almost say the grace, with which he mangles his vernacular is irresistible. Major Gahagan's graphic and highly-coloured accounts of his military and amorous adventures in India are not less amusing, than the cool assurance, peculiar orthography, and quiet sarcasm of Mr Yellowplush. Nor are they less obviously satirical, the Major being an unmistakeable type of that class of military authors, whose exploits never were equalled save by Captain Bobadil, or, perhaps, Baron Munchausen.

Although the 'Book of Snobs' does not exactly rank among Mr Thackeray's early works in point of date, in spirit it is very nearly akin to them. Teeming with humour, full of wise thoughts and dexterously-drawn portraits, it has, after all, no higher character than that of being satirical. There is no balance of effect about it; little else than a uniformity of censure. Its philosophy is merely a protest against hollowness, worthlessness, formality, and stupidity. Its teaching is for the most part of the negative order; and although we read the book with an admiration of the author's sagacity, his power of psychological anatomy, and graphic brilliancy of description, it affects us very much as Hogarth's pictures affect us. The truth of delineation is undeniable, and the moral obvious enough, but we feel that human life must be made up of other elements than the snobbishness which it leads us to consider all but universal. Exaggeration, indeed, may be regarded as inseparable from satire, the purpose of which is to place the thing satirised in the most ludicrous light possible; and although the characters to whom Mr Thackeray introduces us in the 'Book of Snobs,' taken individually, are not greatly exaggerated, they cannot be regarded as average specimens of humanity—at least, they are but the representatives of human weakness and wickedness. It may be said that the author had no other object than to present humanity in those situations or conditions in which it renders itself contemptible or ridiculous. Granted. But his sagacity and knowledge of human nature might have directed him to higher objects. Still, the doctrine of anti-snobbishness has its uses—uses, too, of rather an important kind; and Mr Thackeray having taught higher and nobler lessons since he wrote the 'Snobs of England, by One of Themselves,' we are content to accept of the raillery, the cynicism, even the bitterness of that clever series of essays, for the sake of their negative teaching, and the occasional outbursts of geniality, pathos, and charity which are to be found in them. No one can read them intelligently, without coming to the conclusion, inferentially, that, notwithstanding all his sarcasm, their author has a heart-warm appreciation of the amenities of life, and a deep feeling of reverence for those things which pertain to other than mere earthly interests. The passages which lead us to this conclusion are fewer than we could wish them to be, but they serve to show that Mr Thackeray's social scepticism has not deadened his finer sympathies. In his essay on 'Clerical Snobs,' for example, he very happily says, 'There are some places where Punch acknowledges himself not privileged to make a noise, and puts away his show, and silences his drum, and takes off his hat, and holds his peace.' There is another passage in the same essay, the spirit of which is justly entitled to our admiration, although it is somewhat at variance with the scope of the philosophy which some of Mr Thackeray's books teach, in so far as the secular affairs of life are concerned. 'I know this,' he says, 'that if there are some clerics who do wrong, there are straitway a thousand newspapers to haul up those unfortunates, and cry "Fie upon them! fie upon them!" while, though the press is always ready to yell and bellow excommunication against those stray delinquent parsons, it somehow takes very little count of the many good ones—of the tens of thousands of honest men, who lead Christian lives, and give to the poor generously, who deny themselves rigidly, and live and die in their duty, without ever a newspaper paragraph in their favour. My beloved friend and reader, I wish you and I could do the same, and let me whisper my belief, *entre nous*, that of those eminent philosophers who cry out against parsons the loudest, there are not many who have got their knowledge of the church by going thither often. . . . When old

father Noah was overtaken in his cups, there was only one of his sons that dared to make merry at his disaster, and he was not the most virtuous of the family.' Are there not novelists who deal with the stray men as the newspapers do with the stray parsons? and had Mr Thackeray thrown away his pen after he had written the 'Book of Snobs,' might we not have suggested to him the propriety of thinking a little about Shem and Japhet when he saw the nakedness of society? But Mr Thackeray's career as a novelist has been eminently progressive. Not only has the enlargement of his knowledge of the resources of his art been manifested in all his more recent works; not only do they evince more elevated conceptions of that art; but his experience of human life has enabled him to impart a more thorough individuality to his characters, and to make them the embodiments of more enlarged views of human nature. Although his satirical vein flows as freely as ever, there is more of the milk of human kindness in his heart. Let us rather say that his natural love of true manliness and his reverence for goodness, have been freed from that taint of cynicism which his mind received from a too close and too frequent contemplation of the world's hollow conventionalities and saddening hypocrisies. His sins against the amenities of social life, if sins they were, probably proceeded from the early direction of his analytical mind. He entered into society with the lamp of Diogenes, and because its light revealed to him the shams and the wickedness of the men and women of fashion, those whom other writers had made their heroes and heroines, he had well-nigh come to the Falstaffian conclusion, that there was no honesty extant. His rebellion against the false taste and false morality of preceding novelists drove him to an extreme, which in a less healthy writer would have been misanthropy. Their heroes had been all wicked handsome fellows; where he embodied honour and truth, it must needs be in the most unattractive form possible. If we love Major Dobbin, the only really noble character in 'Vanity Fair,' we must do so for his moral qualities alone, and in spite of his ungainly person and awkward manners. Mr Thackeray's early heroines, too, because they are pure and simple, must needs be silly. The woman of intellect and wit must be tainted with the hypocrisy of the society in which she shines, even if she is not naturally malicious. She towards whom our sympathies are expected to flow, who has not been perverted by fashion, who has not been taught to live a life of practical 'fibbing,' must be not only commonplace, but weaker than the average of womankind. Womanhood thus presented itself in Mr Thackeray's first novels, either in the Becky Sharp and Blanche Amory type, or in that of Amelia Osborne and Mrs Pendennis. True, there is in the character of the last-mentioned lady, particularly in its fuller development towards the close of her life, some redeeming traits—a piety which the author earnestly invites us to reverence, and a maternal devotion against which he refuses to let us close our hearts; but it is obvious that, in order to carry out his purpose, Mr Thackeray studiously refused to allow any of his virtuous characters even to suggest, much less to embody the heroic, as it had been commonly embodied by novelists. This extreme, the necessary consequence, perhaps, of a recoil from the Rosa-Matildaism of the fashionable fictitious literature, was false in degree, if not in nature. It was productive of truth, but the truth was partial, and was not such as the art of the novelist ought to have unfolded. Mr Thackeray's practice was in effect that of a literary pre-Raphaelite, as the term is applied to a certain section of modern artists. His principles were sound enough in the main, but the illustration of them was unfair. He could have eschewed the false sentiment which pervaded the works of his predecessors and contemporaries, without rendering his characters devoid of sentiment; he might have, and has since given us representations of human nature not free from faults, yet neither weak nor wicked. He certainly did not need to point the contrast to villany and hypocrisy with mere virtuous respectability. But the extreme to which his purpose led him had, like all extremes, the effect of carrying him beyond the principles on which that purpose was founded; and hence, to revert to our artistic analogy, he selected as his models the worst or poorest specimens of their respectable classes. Mr Thackeray is thus more a moraliser than a moralist in some of his earlier works. He tells us that life is a masquerade, and either shakes our faith in human nature, by obtruding all that is hollow and bad

about it, or makes it seem a poor thing at the best, by showing us that the unmasked faces are very plain and meaningless, and the right-hearted only right, because they are not clever enough to go very far wrong. Merely to moralise upon the 'shams' of life, to make a vocation of exposing them, to hold up the skull before the eyes of beauty, and say, 'to this favour she must come,' to appeal to the self-consciousness of each of us for a verdict against ourselves, in short, to persuade us that with most men the great fact of existence is a very small fact after all, is neither to teach the true value of life, nor to show how it may be made noble. The philosophy which teaches us to regard men around us as living for mere selfish ends, and not even living honestly for these, has a tendency to produce that indifference which some even of Mr Thackeray's best characters frequently manifest. The aim of the moralist is far other than this. It is to balance the evil and the good that are in the world; to illustrate for us not only the corrupting influences of an artificial and selfish way of living, but the true beauty of an unselfish nature; not only to expose what is hollow, heartless, and bad, but to win our admiration for the character which approximates most nearly to rectitude, to win it for the faith which is strengthened by suffering, and the love which clings the closer as the blasts of worldly adversity sweep over it. To even a higher altitude than this the moralist ought to raise our thoughts. He ought to teach us that sincerity and common honesty, however they may separate us from the hypocrisy and shallowness of those phases of society with which Mr Thackeray has chiefly dealt, are not of themselves sufficient to make this life what it ought to be—the vestibule to the great eternal presence-chamber. He ought to teach us that a sense of the value of life is only to be derived from a consideration of that which lies beyond it. Let us confess, however, that Mr Thackeray has outgrown so much of his early cynicism, that his popularity indicates a soundness of tone in the public taste, and a genuine appreciation of the novelist's true vocation. He has at length mingled kindness, deep feeling, and a fine sense of what is pure and noble, with his censure of what is base. The ascent to this position was begun in 'Pendennis,' which is a far truer, because, upon the whole a brighter, picture of human life than was given us in 'Vanity Fair.' If there is an approximation in the character of Blanche Amory of the former to the wickedly-clever Becky Sharp of the latter, there is also a representation of true womanliness in Laura, and of true manliness in Warrington. In this novel, Mr Thackeray paints the world of fashion and letters as he has seen and experienced it, and draws men as he has known them. He knows that there are clever writers who are often in the Queen's Bench, and with whom it is an impossibility to spend twenty shillings prudently; hence his Captain Shandon, who writes a brilliant article, and spends the ten pounds which he receives for it as freely as if, like Jerrold's 'Mr Jericho,' he had a bank under his waistcoat. He knows that there are publishers who are mere toadying tradesmen, like Mr Bungay, and conceited would-be poets, like the Hon. Percy Popjoy—we all know it—and he does not allow his readers to run away with the belief that every person who writes is a genius, or that the commercial affairs of literature are conducted on other principles than those of supply and demand. He knows what influences are brought to bear upon newspaper editors; and hence we learn that the writers in the 'Pall Mall Gazette' puff the works in which they have an interest more or less, and mangle those which they have an interest in mangling. No one will pretend to say that Mr Thackeray writes either ignorantly or bitterly about the world of letters, because he does all this. He only paints things which he knows to exist in that world. He has said very distinctly other ways than in the pages of his novel, that he *has* known truculent critics, and has carried money from others to literary men in prison, like Captain Shandon; and he very properly asks why these things should not be described, if they illustrate that awful struggle between right and wrong which goes on in our breasts and in the world. We do not see why Mr Thackeray should exclude literary men from his satire any more than men of the world. He represents his hero, Arthur Pendennis, as a rather foppish, and not very wise young man, even although he has written a successful novel, and edits a magazine; but do we not know that there are many who do both, and who yet have no claim to be considered much wiser than those

who have never written a line for the press? We can confidently affirm, that in any of the literary coteries the original of Arthur Pendennis might be very easily found. For the honour of human nature, we hope that the original of his friend Warrington might also be met with. In that character, Mr Thackeray did much to atone for the darker views of human life with which he previously made us rather too familiar. Who is there who does not love Warrington, with all his roughness? We see in him a strong noble nature bearing up under a great weight of sorrow heaped upon it by an error arising out of the very strength of his affections—an error atoned for by suffering and generous self-sacrifice. He is the type of the aimless thinker—capable of doing great things, giving wise counsel and hearty sympathy, yet, for all really practical purposes, wasting his fulness of life and great powers in doing the mere task-work of the day, for which he cares nothing when it is done. Warrington is, we think, a perfectly original character in modern fiction, yet singularly true to life. With much of the heroic about him, he is something like an intellectual Samson, who has set himself to grind at the mill, rejoicing in his undeveloped force. Nor is Mr Thackeray's progress in the appreciation of what is good and genuine in human nature less apparent in Harry Foker, the simple, unintellectual, fashionable, 'fast' man, whose sporting tendencies and reckless way of life have neither blinded him to what is pure, nor stopped the flow of his generous impulses. Not at all regular in his habits, because he has too much money and too much time to spend; far from being refined in his manners, seeing that the stable and the turf are not precisely the places where men learn to be polite, Foker has yet a sound heart, and a warm one. We cannot choose but laugh at him, and deprecate many of his actions, but we take him to be a truer representative of the plebeian young man of fortune than any character which Mr Thackeray presented to us in his 'Book of Snobs.'

The critic who would claim for Mr Thackeray the merit of representing human nature in its common aspects with that truthfulness which entitles us to consider him an earnest and thoughtful student of it, might very properly rest that claim upon the strongly-marked individuality of those characters who, like Foker, play subordinate parts in his stories. This is mainly to be ascribed, we think, to the thoroughly realistic principle pervading his works; to the distinctness with which he presents to us the scenes and persons of real life, investing each with its due amount of importance, and its appropriate moral. Thoughtfully cognisant of the fact, that in the drama of everyday life each individual actor is a centre of interest, more or less intense, he has no need to resort to aught that is out of the way, in order to gain our sympathies or awaken our antipathies. A histrionic genius will make itself manifest in the second or third-rate parts of a play, and to Mr Thackeray human nature has its relative value in all conditions and circumstances. Thus, still referring to his two earlier essays in elaborate novel writing, he gives us a Sir Pitt Crawley and a Jos Sedley, distinctly marked, yet unexaggerated characters in 'Vanity Fair;' and in 'Pendennis,' a Major Pendennis, with his man Morgan, a tipsy Irish Costigan, with his daughter, great as an actress, but tawdry, stupid, and vain as a woman, not to speak of the Hoolans and Doolans, the Finucanes and Captain Strongs, on whom important parts of the author's plan depend. Each of these characters might be taken as a study from real life; but we may merely point to that of the Major in 'Pendennis'—the worldly-minded uncle of the hero in that story—whose consistency is never for an instant lost, and of whom we receive so complete and life-like an impression in every chapter in which he appears, that we recognise some one like him standing in the window of a club-house as we pass it. The case is precisely similar as regards that tippling, vaunting, unconscionable old scoundrel Costigan, whose ragged whiskers and ruby nose we have more than once recognised in the streets. The perfect finish of all those characters who perform secondary parts in our author's stories, tends rather to heighten than to diminish the interest attaching to the more prominent ones, by strengthening the effect of reality under which all of them move about us. They do not pass before us as mere figures in a panoramic view of life; we go in and out among them, make their acquaintance, see them in all circumstances, and judge of them accordingly. It is this which gives to Mr Thackeray's novels their true value, in a moral point of view. By becoming something more than an Asmo-

deus, he actually extends and deepens our experience of life; we rise from a perusal of what he writes with a better knowledge of the world than we had before. No doubt we are compelled to look at it as our philosophical guide does, and to sit with him in the scorner's chair in the corner of the drawing-room; but then our next series of observations or experiences may have a much more direct bearing on our own way of life than we care to admit, and so we take them home with us, and feel that there is nothing to prevent others from thinking us as absurd as we have thought them. To show us a way of escape from this kind of self-censure, Mr Thackeray presents us with those characters in which true manliness and womanliness develop themselves, and are their own reward. All this may be thought to apply so directly to our author as a delineator of contemporary life and manners, that his 'History of Henry Esmond, Esq.,' relating as it does to events and personages of Queen Anne's days, would require to be differently estimated, to be judged of, as the historical novel usually is, by a reference to what is called the ideal, rather than what we know of the real. This is the case only as regards the historical personages introduced into that work; the principal characters, as studies of human nature, are quite as much creatures of the world in which we move as those of 'Vanity Fair.' The manners and the events, so far as they relate to national history, are different, but the heart and its workings are the same. Nevertheless, we are inclined to regard 'Esmond' as something like an experiment—a feat in which Mr Thackeray has been only partially successful. In so far as he has essayed to write a family history in the manner in which it would or might have been written at the period to which his story relates, he has been perfectly successful. The imitation is complete, and there is more than imitation; there is a thoroughly dramatic realisation of the mode of life of the period. Had Mr Thackeray imposed no other fetters upon himself—had he confined himself to the mere externals of that period, and introduced no other characters but those which are fictitious, we should only have had to admire his skill, in addition to his power as a painter of life. But he has been compelled unduly to associate the critical with the creative faculty, by the introduction of historical characters, which could not be looked at from a contemporary point of view, and which every reader of English history has attempted to depict for himself. We have Steele represented as the thoughtless, jolly, inconsistent, and far from abstemious person, for whom Mr Thackeray invites our sympathy in his 'Lectures on the English Humorists;' we have Swift made even more coarse and brutal, because with less of his intellect displayed, than in that book of clever criticism; and we have also Mr Thackeray's ideas of Addison, Bolingbroke, and Marlborough personified. We dissent from the estimate which he, as a critic, forms of some of these men, and we cannot accept of his portraits of them as persons moving in the life to which his story relates. There must always be the greatest difficulty connected with the introduction of well-known literary or historical characters among those which are fictitious or typical, if indeed it be not a mistake to introduce them into the world of fiction at all. Scott, our greatest historical novelist, appreciated this difficulty, and overcame it much more successfully than Thackeray has done; for, in order, as we suppose, to balance the interest of his story, the latter has perpetrated more than one rather absurd anachronism, which the reader of history may easily detect. Still 'Esmond,' so far as its chief characters and incidents are concerned, is entitled to be regarded as a masterly work. Some of the characters are among the finest in modern fiction. That of the hero, Henry Esmond, is complete from boyhood to manhood—complete in its truth to the conventionalities of the time as well as to nature. The same may be said of the proud, ambitious, fickle Beatrix Castlewood—a woman with power enough to have swayed an empire as she swayed the hearts of her admirers; with captivating beauty and extraordinary vivacity, yet with so strong a dash of evil in her character, that we only admire her under protest. Her mother, Lady Castlewood, would almost seem to have been designed as Mr Thackeray's answer to the charges so often urged against him on behalf of womanhood. In her we see all those feminine graces which are awanting in some of his earlier heroines, combined with strength of mind enough to separate her from those of them that are merely amiable. Beautiful, noble, self-denying, and religious, a devoted wife

and a loving mother, had she but died ere Mr Thackeray marred her countenance with small-pox, the fair portion of his readers might have pardoned all the cynicism of his youth; nay, had she even then lived on in her widowhood, mourning her husband, slain in a foul duel, and her daughter, lost and shameless, our admiration for her would have been all but unbounded. But this model of womanliness falls sadly from the ideal, when she confesses her love for the lover of her daring daughter, Beatrix, subdues, with a kind of hysterical sentiment, the Esmond whom she had honoured in boyhood with her motherly caresses, and ultimately marries him after she has passed her grand climacteric. Now, we take this to be not only an outrage upon all those higher sentiments to which we expect the novelist to be faithful, but a departure from delicacy—a great departure from the common truth of life. What would any of Mr Thackeray's fair readers say to the probability, or even the possibility, of one of their admirers marrying mamma after he had been a rejected suitor? Yet this same lady, who comes to her end, so far as the purpose of the novelist is concerned, in so questionable a manner, is really a sweet lady—Mr Thackeray's most complete and tender delineation of womanhood. The growth of her affection, and the expression of it, evince an appreciation on his part of the finer traits of femininity—a knowledge of the depths of woman's heart which no modern novelist, except, perhaps, the authoress of 'Jane Eyre,' has ever shown. The most fastidious and critical of womankind might forgive all but the nearly unnatural relation in which Lady Castlewood is placed to Harry Esmond—all the wicked Becky Sharpisms and the silly Ameliaisms—for the sake of the true love and hearty admiration which Mr Thackeray here manifests for their sex.

There is one great truth which seems to us to lie at the foundation of all Mr Thackeray's more elaborate works; it is, that neither fame nor riches, that no amount of worldly success or command of worldly resources, can compensate mankind for the want of that domestic happiness which can only flow from marriages dictated by motives of purity and sincere affection. In the illustration of this truth, he has employed all his sarcasm, all his humour; in the enforcement of it, he has made his most powerful appeals to our finer sentiments. Even the *denouement* of 'Esmond' is to be ascribed, we think, to the urgency with which this moral pressed itself upon him; and the suggestion of it is unquestionably the purpose he has had in view throughout the whole of his last and best work, 'The Newcomes.' We regret that our fast diminishing space does not allow us to make such a digression as would enable us to prosecute some inquiries as to how this aim of Mr Thackeray's may have affected his views of life in general. We can only venture upon the inference, that it has assumed the prominence which it undoubtedly holds in his social philosophy, from a keen perception, perhaps an experience more than ordinarily powerful, of domestic happiness or the opposite. It is not the province of the critic, however, to do more than trace the influence or examine the illustration of any strongly fixed truth throughout an author's works, and we have referred to this the primary truth of Mr Thackeray's novels, in order that we may show how it has guided him throughout 'The Newcomes.' As a story, that work is not superior, if it is even equal, to 'Vanity Fair.' There are scenes in it which are only saved from being tedious by the author's masterly portrait-painting, and his felicitous manner of describing the vices and follies of fashionable life. They contribute but little to the development of the plot, or they do so only in a remote way; but they do much to show his thorough knowledge of human life, and of the resources of his art. There are several merely accessory characters introduced: Madame the Duchesse d'Ivry, for example, a woman of the world in the almost criminal sense of that appellation, who intrigues at Baden, haunts the roulette table, and foments quarrels among the men; there is Mr Gandish, a vain devotee of 'high art,' who is an insufferable Cockney; the Rev. Charles Honeyman, whom we can only designate a fashionable parson; there is J. J. Ridley, a poor student of painting, with whom the love of his vocation is an enthusiasm, an inspiration carrying him away into a region remote from the turbulence of the world; and there are Captains Hoby and Goby, stupid warriors; Sir Thomas de Boots, a purple-faced apoplectic general; Mr Sherricks, a speculating wine merchant, with his vulgarly fashionable wife and daughter, and groups of equally interesting person-

ages, all of whom only are notable illustrations of Mr Thackeray's keen perception of the salient points in human character, and his power of painting from the living model. In even a still more *con amore* style, he makes us acquainted with just such a set of jovial literary men as, without any derogation to his dignity as a moralist, we can conceive him to have been in the habit of meeting, when the mental labours of the day were over. Chief of that set, and playing a part in the history of the Newcome Family which greatly redounds to his honour, while developing his harum-scarum character, his sterling honesty and goodness of heart, is Mr Frederick Bayham — the redoubted F. B., who, notwithstanding his pecuniary difficulties and his *penchant* for beer, his sarcasm, his jollity, and his general tendency to living upon his wits, is in his proper place when sorrows abound and hearts are stricken, as well as when the wine circulates freely around the festive board, and the clouds of tobacco smoke conceal the literary brethren at the 'Haunt' from one another. F. B. is such a character as only Mr Thackeray would have essayed to paint. Presenting something like the comic side of Warrington, the mingling of sentiment and tenderness with his broad genial humour invests him with a distinct individuality. He is first introduced to us in a black frock and large broad-brimmed beaver, looking like a preacher; 'at other times you see him in a green coat and blue neckcloth, as if the turf or the driving of coaches was his occupation.' The raiment fitly represents the man who wears it, symbolises as it were his motley character, which, with all its oddity, is yet one which none of us can choose but love. We cannot, however, even name all the variously constituted personages whom Mr Thackeray places upon his wide stage as subordinate actors in the drama of human life which he unfolds. Our object is to trace the working out of the primary truth to which we have alluded in the leading incidents of the story, and in doing so, we shall not attempt to give more than the merest outline of it, the many interests subsidiary to the main one precluding everything but a reference to the latter. Acting on a principle which we conceive to be highly artistic, Mr Thackeray introduces us to two personages, one of whom is destined to awaken all our sympathies, and frequently to engross all the interest of the story—these are Colonel Thomas Newcome, an Indian officer, and Leonore de Bois, or de Florac, the daughter of a French refugee. The whole action of the story parts these two characters. Tom Newcome falls in love with the pretty Leonore while he is being taught French by her father, alarms his family by declaring his intention of marrying her, and not supposing that there is any obstacle to his happiness except the obstinacy of his parents, finds that the old Frenchman's high sense of honour has been outraged by his plebeian proposals, and that the daughter has been bestowed upon a fiddling countryman of her own, old enough to be her parent, the Comte de Florac. Parted thus at the beginning of the history, which the now sensible Mr Arthur Pendennis relates on the part of Mr Thackeray, the heart-stricken lovers meet no more until Time has done his work with them, and are brought close together again only when Death changes the countenance of one of them, and takes him away. Tom Newcome carries his first great grief to India, and is there taken possession of matrimonially by a widow, whose life is happily of no long duration, and who leaves to him a son named Clive, the idol of his father's heart; Leonore returns to France with her old husband, whom she nurses kindly, seeking consolation for her early and ever-unforgotten grief in offices of piety and deeds of charity. There we leave her, to turn again to the object of her heart's choice, who comes back from India, rich in worldly substance, but richer far in that simple nobility of character which his hard experiences have developed. The education and the happiness of his son Clive are all that the father has to live for, and to him he seeks to devote himself and all his possessions. But kinsmen, to whom the existence of a poor relation in India had been a matter of supreme indifference, welcome the rich Colonel, and win their way into his good graces by attentions to his darling son. Sir Brian Newcome, of the great banking-house of Newcome Brothers, comes upon the stage, bringing with him his aristocratic spouse, Lady Anne, and along with other members of her family, her daughter Ethel, the heroine, and her son Barnes, the villain of the story. Colonel Newcome is drawn towards his pretty niece Ethel by certain sympathetic ties. She comes indeed to occupy a place in his affections only second to Clive, and after

kissing her little hand, and invoking blessings on her head, the fond old man sees from his balcony the slim figure of the retreating girl, and as the smoke of his cigar floats into the air he forms a castle on it, whereof Clive is lord and Ethel lady. 'What a fine, frank, generous, bright-eyed creature is yonder,' thought he. 'What a fine match might be made between that child and Clive,' he says to his old Indian companion, James Binnie; 'she reminds me of a pair of eyes I haven't seen these forty years. I should like to have Clive married to her; to see him out of the scrapes and dangers that young fellows encounter, and safe with such a sweet girl as that. If God had so willed it, I might have been happy myself, and could have made a woman happy; but the Fates were against me. I should like to see Clive happy, and then say, *Nunc dimittis.* I shan't want anything more to-night, Kean,' he adds to his valet, 'and you may go to bed.' So moralises the brave old man; but others besides he have their schemes for the future of Ethel, and the Fates are against Thomas Newcome still, for the evil genius in the form of the young lady's maternal grandmother, Lady Kew, combines with the diabolical brother Barnes to secure for her an alliance more worthy, in their worldly estimation of her beauty and position, than that upon which the Colonel has set his fond and noble heart. True to the principle of the book, the girl becomes the victim of her selfish match-making relatives, and has her fine nature partially spoiled by the morally unhealthy life she is taught to lead. Clive, to whose natural endowments his father strives to lend all the attractions which his resources can command, is captivated by his beautiful cousin; loves her with a true and fervent love, and is, moreover, the object of Ethel's special interest. But, in addition to the strong objections entertained by Lady Kew to his social position, he is unfortunately gifted with a love of art and the enthusiasm of an artist, and is, therefore, deemed altogether beneath the rich banker's daughter, in whose veins is known to flow the blood of a humble barber, who came over considerably later than the Conqueror. We cannot stay to speak of the fine episodes of artist life so felicitously introduced *apropos* of Clive's career, or of the thorough knowledge even of the under-currents of that life which *Mr Thackeray evinces* in the dialogues of the young painter with his fellow students and companions. Suffice it to say, that while his friend the Colonel's protégé, J. J. Ridley, makes his way steadily to the heights of his profession, Clive, bewildered, and led away by his passion for Ethel into the fashionable society in which she shines, becomes a restless and somewhat aimless worker. The machinations of the odious grandmother and brother are so successful, that Ethel gives way—rejects her cousin from motives against which her own better nature rebels, and is affianced to Lord Kew, a sensible young nobleman, to whom the matrimonial usages of fashionable life are all as they should be; to whom a marriage devised by grandmothers and prospective mothers-in-law is a quiet consummation to be looked to after the wild oats are sown. Lord Kew is one of Mr Thackeray's finest delineations—a character the completeness of which we are glad he has not spoiled by a mercenary marriage; for, after being wounded in a duel, higher thoughts and purer feelings are brought to him by pain and weakness, by maternal tenderness and self-examination, and he releases Ethel from the engagement which others have made for her. The knowledge of this to him apparently auspicious circumstance brings Clive post-haste from Rome, where he has been studying the Old Masters, only to be again repulsed by the Dowager-Lady Kew, and to learn that his cousin is being hawked about, exposed in ball-rooms and in polite society generally, for matrimonial sale. There is no hope for the smitten artist, and even the Colonel's affectionate regard for Ethel is changed into something like disgust at her apparent worldliness and hollowness of heart. The old man's hopes thus frustrated, bends his mind upon a union between Clive and Rosa, the niece of his old Scottish friend, James Binnie, upon whom she and her virago of a mother, Mrs Mackenzie, have settled themselves, and are not slow to meet the wishes of Colonel Newcome. These ladies henceforth occupy a prominent part in the story; the mother at first as a vulgar, selfish, intriguing woman, the daughter as a little, silly, helpless maiden, who will sing any of her four songs or marry any young gentleman, at her mother's bidding. Clive, in the state of apathy and indifference to which his disappointments have brought him, is ready to yield to the match-making schemes of Mrs Mackenzie, and the steadily but

gently pressed wishes of his father. The Colonel, forgetful of his own early experiences, exerts an influence which binds his son to Rosa by a marriage of indifference. Meanwhile other characters are playing their parts according to the leading principle with which Mr Thackeray has set out. A certain Lady Clara Pulleyn, daughter of the Earl of Dorking, is induced to forsake a strong-willed, rough, yet good-hearted fellow, named Jack Belsize, by whom her young affections have been won, and who loves her with an uncontrollable passion. Jack is only the younger son of a nobleman, while Mr Barnes Newcome, afterwards Sir Barnes, is a rich banker, and so the timid Lady Clara is bound to that genuine specimen of the nineteenth-century scoundrel—a seducer, a braggart, 'a lily-livered knave,' who is expected to make a good husband. Neglected, insulted, tyrannised over, beaten by him, Lady Clara lives on in that state of misery to which 'the Fates,' in the persons of her match-making relatives, have consigned her, and at last flies with Jack Belsize, now become Lord Highgate, after that individual has inflicted corporeal chastisement on her dastardly husband in the market-place of the town which he represents in Parliament. And here we have another aspect of the leading thought of the story, for there is no return to the point from whence those husbands, and wives, and lovers set out on the wrong road to matrimonial happiness. As Mr Thackeray sarcastically points the moral of the case of Newcome *v.* Highgate, it is this—'Suppose a young creature taken out of her home, and given over to a hard taskmaster—consigned to cruel usage, to weary loneliness, to bitter, bitter recollections of the past; suppose her schooled into hypocrisy by tyranny—and then, quick, let us hire an advocate to roar out to a British jury the wrongs of her injured husband, to paint the agonies of his bleeding heart, and to show society injured through him. Let us console that martyr, I say, with thumping damages; and as for the woman, the guilty wretch, let us lead her out and stone her.' And thus it is, for Lady Clara, even though legally divorced from Barnes Newcome, and married to her first lover, is still an outcast.

Others, in whom the readers of 'The Newcomes' will take a livelier interest, are also gathering the fruits of those nuptial ties whose roots have never reached the heart. Grief comes to Clive, and deeper grief to his brave old father, for an Indian bank breaks, and ruins their worldly prospects; the young wife is feeble, loveless, and peevish; while the mother-in-law is a raging savage, who scares away from the young artist's hearth and the Colonel's heart all that had been left there of peace and joy. Ethel alone is saved, by the death of grandmother Kew, and the terrible lesson set forth in the fate of her sister-in-law, Lady Clara. She comes back to our affections, a pure high-minded woman, with her thoughts and feelings chastened and elevated. She devotes herself to her brother's motherless children, and after exciting our apprehensions lest she should become a mere woman of the world, she rises superior to the circumstances of her position, and is enabled to triumph over the evil influences that threatened to pervert her highmindedness. To make his heroes and heroines happy at last, according to the ordinary practice of novelists, is not consistent with Mr Thackeray's theory of that art by which he produces a work which he designs to be a reflection of human life, and therefore we at the end of the history of 'The Newcomes' obtain only a dim and not very satisfactory glimpse of a future, in which Ethel and Clive are brought together, little Rosa having gone the way of all living, and her mother, the 'Old Campaigner,' being left, as we may suppose, to the punishment of self-torture. This, however, is but a visionary close to the story, the real *denouement* of which is the death of Colonel Newcome. That noble old man, the finest of all Mr Thackeray's characters, and one of the most complete studies in the whole range of fiction, rises to the heroic height amid the wreck of his hopes and the ruin of his worldly prospects. Under the promptings of his chivalrous honour, he beggars himself for the sake of those whom, in his keen conscientiousness, he conceives to have been involved by him in the failure of the Bundlecund Bank, and stunned by the blows he receives through his son's domestic misery, he steals away to assume the gown of a poor Brother of the Charter-house. Very touching are the last scenes in the life of Thomas Newcome. Never has Mr Thackeray gone so deep into life and character, never has he shown so fine a sympathy with the higher feelings and the more sacred relations of human nature, as in those chap-

ters in which this good old man is represented grandly enduring the repeated strokes of adversity, freed from his absurdities, his Quixoticism, his pride, and his frailties of temper, rising to a dignified simplicity, a cheerful resignation, and a firmness of faith, which elevates our admiration and love into reverence. The final scene of all, from which the turmoil and animosities of life are shut out, and where Love and Piety watch and pray, as Thomas Newcome approaches the valley and shadow of death, forms one of the tenderest and most delicately drawn pictures ever conceived by the novelist. In that scene, the Leonore of the colonel's youthful love, and the Clive and Ethel of his deep parental devotion, are again brought near to him. He has taken farewell of his little grandson, the latest idol of his loving heart.

'Some time afterwards, Ethel came in with a scared face to our pale group. "He is calling for you again, dear lady," she said, going up to Madame de Florac, who was still kneeling, "and just now he said he wanted Pendennis to take care of his boy. He will not know you." She hid her tears as she spoke.

'She went into the room, where Clive was at the bed's foot; the old man within it talked on rapidly for awhile; then again he would sigh and be still; once more I heard him say hurriedly, "Take care of him when I'm in India;" and then with a heartrending voice he called out, "Leonore, Leonore!" She was kneeling by his side now. . . . At the usual evening hour the chapel bell began to toll, and Thomas Newcome's hands feebly beat time. And just as the last bell struck, a peculiar sweet smile shone over his face, and he lifted his head a little, and quickly said '*Adsum*,' and fell back. It was the word we used at school, when names were called; and lo! he, whose heart was that of a little child, had answered to his name, and stood in the presence of the Master.'

While Mr Thackeray shows us the results of falsehoods and mistakes, of selfishness and heartlessness, in the formation of those relationships which can only be worthily entered into when purity and affection guide us, he gives us a beautiful picture of womanly tenderness and matronly placidity in Laura, one of the characters in 'Pendennis,' whom he has reproduced as the wife of the supposed narrator of the Newcome history, that Laura into whose lips he put some of the best protests against selfishness which the first-mentioned work contained. We have her brought before us now as the devoted wife who has drawn her husband out of his scepticism, as the central figure of a home where love is the presiding genius, and as the messenger of comfort and consolation to those who are reaping the bitter harvest of their loveless and faithless sowing. With the moral which Laura suggests, Mr Thackeray has, we think, effectually silenced those who have complained of his imperfect pictures of womanhood. Who will doubt his capability of appreciating 'a perfect woman nobly planned,' or his reverence for that which is the crowning jewel of such a character, after he reads that passage in 'The Newcomes,' in which Laura Pendennis flies to the rescue of the stricken and tempted Lady Clara, preparing herself for such sacred duty; in the way her husband thus describes?—'I could see she was engaged where pious women ever will betake themselves in moments of doubt, of grief, of pain, of separation, of joy even, or whatsoever other trial. They have but to will, and as it were an invisible temple rises round them; their hearts can kneel down there; and they have an audience of the great, the merciful, untiring Counsellor and Consoler. . . . Would you ask what the husband's feelings were as he looked at that sweet love, that sublime tenderness blessing the life of him unworthy? Of all the gifts of Heaven to us below, that felicity is the sum and the chief.' With such a quotation as this we might fitly close our already somewhat extended notice of Mr Thackeray's writings. We have confined ourselves to a few of their leading characteristics, and have done little more than touch upon the inimitable humour which pervades them, humour which we conceive to be all the more healthy in its tone for being dashed with sarcasm! We have scarcely even referred to the clear, vigorous and thoroughly English style in which Mr Thackeray clothes his sage thoughts, his searching satire, and his deep heart-touching pathos. We are compelled, moreover, to leave unnoticed the delightful essays contributed to the periodical literature of the day; compositions with which the public cannot be so familiar as it now is with the works that bear his name, but which are nevertheless worthy, not only for force of

thought, but purity and vigour of style, to take their place among the English classics. The best of these, we are glad to learn, are about to be given to the world in a permanent form, and it will be found, we think, that they are in all respects worthy of the author of 'The Newcomes.'

Whoever has read Mr Thackeray's later works with the attention which they deserve, does not need to be told that there are in them numberless generous, pure, and kindly sentiments, which have come from a heart that hath kept watch o'er man's mortality. If in his earlier ones there was a preponderance of those darker thoughts which the inconsistencies of society are calculated to awaken, and a tendency to hear too quickly the jarring chords of life's wild music, let it be remembered, to the honour of one of our greatest living writers, that the purpose of all his less pleasing pictures of men and manners has been reformatory, and that hearing within his heart the whisper to be of better cheer, he has, while rendering folly ridiculous and vice hateful, manifested a genial forbearance and a loving pity, making us acquainted with, and constraining us to love, characters in whom we recognise the best features of our imperfect human nature.

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